Don’t Forget to Share

The Crucial Last Step in the Writing Workshop

Leah Mermelstein

Foreword by Carl Anderson

HEINEMANN
Portsmouth, NH
In today’s educational climate—one dominated by the pressures of high-stakes testing—it can seem risky to have an ambitious vision for the writing workshop. Some of us might respond to talk of such a vision by saying, *What you’re saying sounds great, but with all that I have to do in my classroom, there just isn’t the time to do what you’re talking about.*

Leah Mermelstein has an ambitious vision for the writing workshop, which she details in her book *Don’t Forget to Share: The Crucial Last Step in the Writing Workshop*. She expects that during every writing workshop, students will talk together as a class about their writing in sophisticated ways that will help them learn from each other about how to grow as writers. In the book, Leah shows us how we can do this, but not by suggesting another structure that we’ll have to shoehorn into our already jam-packed writing workshop time. Instead, Leah helps us reimagine how an already existing part of our writing workshop, the share session, can be the time when these conversations can take place.

Traditionally, the share session has been a time when one student would sit on the author’s chair and read his piece to the class. Afterward, the student would field a few questions about the content of his piece. For several reasons, many teachers have abandoned this kind of share session, one being that they felt the questions students asked were superficial ones and didn’t support meaningful revisions. Instead, many teachers today use share session time as a kind of show-and-tell. One or two students talk about something interesting they did that period in their current piece of writing—often in
response to that day’s minilesson—as the rest of the students listen and (hopefully) hear about something they could try in their writing.

In Don’t Forget to Share, Leah revises the conventional thinking about shares. While in this book, you’ll see examples of shares in which students still sit on the author’s chair and read their pieces, and in which students still talk to the class about what they did as writers during that period, Leah helps us imagine how these experiences can lead to rich whole-class conversations that can impact every student in the class as a writer.

Moreover, Leah helps us see that there can be different kinds of conversations in share sessions. In some shares, for example, the students will discuss the content of one or two students’ pieces, and through the discussion, they will discover ways that all of them can revise their pieces. In other shares, students will talk about the craft techniques that several of their classmates have used in their writing and, as a result of this talk, be able to imagine how to craft their own writing in these new ways. And on other days, the students will discuss their writing processes and teach each other about their ways of navigating the different steps in the writing process. In these kinds of shares, and the others that Leah talks about in the book, students learn about strategies and techniques they’ll need to become strong writers.

I admire how clear and practical Leah is throughout the book. Knowing Leah as I do—we were colleagues at the Teachers College Reading and Writing Project at Columbia University for several years—this doesn’t surprise me. Leah was known throughout the project community for the clarity of her thinking and for ideas that really work in classrooms. Throughout the book are transcripts of shares conducted by Leah or one of the teachers with whom she works. There are also numerous tips for you to follow to have similar shares in your writing workshop. I’m certain that you’ll feel excited to try out the different kinds of share sessions that Leah discusses right away and that Leah will give you the know-how and confidence you’ll need to be successful.

I can’t imagine that after you read Don’t Forget to Share you’ll say that you don’t have the time to do the ambitious teaching that Leah discusses in this book. You already have the time built in to your writing workshop. As Leah helps us see, it’s how we choose to use the time we have that makes the biggest difference in our students’ growth as writers. In these challenging times, I find Leah’s book to be not only practical but inspirational, too.

—Carl Anderson

Foreword
Acknowledgments

It certainly is fitting that a book on sharing has been influenced by so many people who have graciously shared their thinking and experiences with me. I begin by thanking Wendy Appelgate, Adrienne Genaro, Dustie Zocher, Sally Juzeler, Shellie Hatch, Pauline Shenyer, Marsha Childers, Desiree Mains, Camille Klingele, Beth Buchholz, and Amanda Wilson. This dynamic group of teachers and administrators agreed to join me in studying the share session, and many of the ideas in this book were born during our long and often lively leadership meetings. I thank them for trying the ideas in their classrooms and for sharing what did and did not work. A special thank-you to Pauline Shenyer’s daughter, Leah, who crafted her thoughts about sharing into a gorgeous poem that she so graciously let me use in this book. I thank Daniel Scott O’Neill for taking the cover photograph.

Helen Yu from PS 1 and Ellen McCrum from PS 234 were my local leadership team. This book is far more practical and teacher friendly because of them, and I thank them for their honesty about what they thought teachers needed in order to conduct shares effectively in their classrooms. I thank Amy Hom and Sandy Bridges, the principals of PS 1 and PS 234, for welcoming me into their schools and for letting me watch many wonderful share sessions in action.

I also thank my mentor, Lucy Calkins. I will forever be grateful for all the ways she has supported me professionally. I especially thank her for asking me to join her in coauthoring Launching the Writing Workshop. Through that collaboration I learned how to design a book that includes rich theory alongside practical teaching ideas.
I also want to thank Carl Anderson for graciously writing my foreword. Carl has always been a mentor to me and I thank him for always sharing both his thinking and his advice with me.

There were many people who took time out of their busy lives to read my manuscript and offer me thoughtful critique. Erica Denman, Shawn Brandon, Helen Yu, and Ellen McCrum all read the manuscript at critical junctures, and their wise feedback always reenergized me to keep searching for the clearest ways to explain complicated ideas. I also thank Norman Stiles for reminding me that the best way to revise is to write straight from the heart.

I thank Isole Nia, Linda Chen, Kathy Collins, Randy Bomer, Katherine Bomer, Cheryl Tyler, Katie Wood Ray, Gaby Layden, Ellen Dillon, Carl Anderson, Lisa Burman, Donna Santman, Grace Chough, Annemarie Powers, and Janet Angelillo for being my reading and writing “companions in thought.” Thank you for always challenging me to rethink and revise my beliefs about best ways to teach both reading and writing.

Most of my days are spent working side by side with principals, staff developers, teachers, and students. This book is graced with their brilliant work. I thank everyone from the Prosser Elementary Schools, Schenendehowa Elementary Schools, Guilderland Elementary Schools, Norwalk Elementary Schools, Greenwich Elementary Schools, Springs Elementary School in East Hampton, PS 59, the Learning Community Charter School, Roxbury Elementary School, and Lake George Elementary School.

Of course, I also thank the entire team at Heinemann for their support in putting this book together. A special thanks goes to Kate Mongomery for thinking through this book with me in its earliest stages. I admire her brilliance, her sense of adventure, and her attention to detail. Thanks also to my editor, Harvey Daniels. His words of encouragement always brought a sense of playfulness to my writing, and I thank him for always making his insightful suggestions in a kind and fun-loving manner. I thank Alan Huisman for reading my text with such a careful eye. I thank production editor Patty Adams for her time and attention to my book at its final stages.

Finally, I want to thank my parents and first teachers, Terry and Lothar Mermelstein, who continue to teach me important lessons about living and learning.

Acknowledgments
Overview

I have spent the last ten years, first as a teacher, then as a staff developer, and now as a guest speaker, studying alongside Lucy Calkins and her cadre of brilliant staff developers at the Teachers College Reading and Writing Project. You’ll see the influence of that collaboration throughout the book, especially in the terminology that I use when describing the teaching of writing. For some of you, especially those of you familiar with the work that comes out of Teachers College, these terms will be familiar. For others, some of the terms might be new or used in a slightly different way.

Throughout the book I refer to the writing workshop. A writing workshop is a time in each school day (approximately forty-five minutes to one hour) when you explicitly teach students how to become better writers. A typical writing workshop has a three-part structure: minilesson, work time, and share session. The first part, the minilesson, is usually between ten and fifteen minutes long. It is a time to gather your whole class together to teach the students something new about writing. Nancie Atwell describes the minilesson as a “brief lecture at the start of class about procedures, conventions, craft, genre and topic development” (1998, 15). After the minilesson, there is a work time of about thirty-five minutes during which students work on their own individual writing pieces. During this same time, the teacher confers with students one-on-one or in small groups about their specific strengths and needs. The writing workshop ends with a share session of about ten minutes.
The share session is the focus of this book. As you'll soon discover, many different things can happen during this time, but it should be an opportunity for students to have writerly conversations with one another. These conversations can be in a whole class, in small groups, or in pairs (some people refer to the paired partnership as pair share or buddy work).

Many writing workshop teachers not only conduct a daily writing workshop but also plan their writing curriculum in advance. They create a monthly curriculum of units of study. A unit of study is a road map for what you'll teach over a period of time (usually between two and six weeks) in your writing workshop. Lucy Calkins describes the benefits of using units of study this way: they “allow teachers to plan and organize a sequence of instruction so that over time students successfully tackle new and often increasingly difficult challenges” (2003, 19). Some examples of possible units of study are Launching the Writing Workshop, Narrative Writing, Authors as Mentors, Partnerships, Memoir, Fiction, and Writing About Reading. During a unit of study, students are going through the steps of the writing process. Some of these steps are rehearsal (or brainstorming), drafting, revising, editing, and publishing. The students typically take at least one of their writing pieces through all of the steps, and then teachers bring the study to a close by planning a writing celebration. Most K–2 students store this writing in a writing folder, and most upper-grade students begin keeping a writer's notebook, which they use as a springboard for their drafts.

Units of study often begin with something called immersion. Immersion is a period of time (two to five days) when students, rather than writing, are being saturated with the genre or topic being studied. The purpose of immersion is for kids to notice how a particular type of text is written. This is often referred to as craft. If a class was being immersed in nonfiction, for example, the teacher might begin by reading quality nonfiction literature and then asking her students to do the same. They would notice elements of craft such as headings, diagrams, and descriptive language. After noticing these, kids would be encouraged to try those very same techniques when writing their own nonfiction texts.

During a unit of study, teachers often select and use touchstone texts. Touchstone texts are pieces of literature that the students know and love and that can be used throughout a unit of study as another way of teaching craft. If I wanted to show my students how to use vivid
description, for example, I might use Julie Brinkloe’s *Fireflies* as a touchstone text, showing them the page on which she writes, “It was growing dark. My tree house was a black shape in the tree and I wouldn’t go up there now” (1985, 2). I would let my students know that just as Julie Brinkloe uses very particular words to describe what the setting looked like, they can as well. Many teachers decide to have a few touchstone texts for every unit of study, and I’ve included some of my favorites in Appendix C.

Writing teachers plan their yearly instruction by creating a *curriculum calendar*. Whereas a unit of study details approximately a month of teaching, a curriculum calendar details a year of teaching. Usually, a curriculum calendar is organized by the months of the school year and consists of between eight and fifteen units of study. These studies should be varied; that is, teachers should include some genre units of study (such as nonfiction), some process units of study (such as partnerships), and some craft units of study (such as author studies). Curriculum calendars should also include some longer units of study (four, five, or six weeks) alongside shorter units of study (one, two, or three weeks).

This book focuses primarily on the share session; however, while reading it, you’ll discover how shares connect to the aspects of writing instruction I just described. If you are interested in learning more about the writing workshop, please refer to the book list in Appendix A. For more information visit my website at http://leahmermelstein.com.
Of all qualities, questioning is fundamental to being human. It is how we dispel confusion, probe into new areas, and strengthen our abilities to analyze and deduce.

–Ellen Keene and Susan Zimmermann, *Mosaic of Thought*

It was a sunny Tuesday morning and Beth Scammell’s second graders were in the middle of a share meeting. Sandra was reading aloud her story about the day her younger brother broke his arm. “One day my little brother was sitting on a stool. A few minutes later, he fell off the stool and broke his arm.” The rest of the story told what happened to her brother in the hospital and how the different family members reacted. Toward the end of her story came the statement “My dad was very, very sad, the saddest of us all!” I assumed I was getting the basic gist of the story, but I soon discovered I should have been questioning her text a bit more carefully.

Thank goodness the kids were listening more closely. After Sandra finished, Jake raised his hand and said tentatively, “There is a part of your story I don’t understand. Where was your brother when he fell off the stool?”

Sandra answered, “He was in my dad’s office. My dad had brought him to work with him.”

The entire class had an aha moment. Shouts of “I thought your brother was at home” and “That’s why your dad was the saddest of them all!” erupted from all corners of the classroom. Then Peter chimed in, “I bet your dad wasn’t only sad. I bet he felt guilty.”
Sandra’s eyes lit up: “My dad felt really guilty because he left my brother alone on the stool while he did computer stuff.”

After the share, Beth and I exchanged looks of amazement, not knowing which aspect to focus on first. We were thrilled that everybody (except me) had wondered where Sandra’s brother was when he fell off the stool, and we were convinced that these kids would forever write with a better understanding of the importance of setting. We were pleasantly surprised that Jake, a student who lacked self-confidence, mustered up the courage to ask the all-important question that made Sandra, a very self-confident writer, realize she had left out an important detail. And of course we were excited that Jake’s setting question and Peter’s comment about feeling guilt enabled Sandra to more accurately match what she put on the page to what was in her heart. All of this came from a simple conversation about the content of one student’s writing. Content shares help students question texts and gain a more thorough understanding of revision.

What Is a Content Share?

In a content share, one or two (perhaps three) students read their writing aloud. After each kid reads, the teacher asks the rest of the students to retell what they heard to make sure that everyone understands it. Then the kids ask for more information. Finally, the writer decides which parts of the discussion (if any) will help him revise the writing.

A Content Share in Action

It’s October, and Beth Buchholz’s second graders are in the middle of a personal narrative unit of study.

Getting Ready

- correction tape
- the special paper that the class uses to revise its writing
Observations Before the Share

Beth and I noticed that many students have finished one piece of writing and moved on to another. When we ask why, they say things like “I’m done” or “There is nothing else to write.” We feel that their stories could be developed further but that the kids don’t know how to do this. We decide to conduct a content share in the hope that the conversation will reveal some clear, concrete reasons to revise. After discussing whom we can ask to share, we pick Anthony, because he has resisted our revision ideas in the past and we hope he may be more open to ideas from his classmates. We ask him privately if he will share, and he says yes. He prepares by reading his writing to a partner before the share begins.

Setup

Leah: Today, Anthony is going to read his writing aloud. Afterward we’ll retell it to make sure that we understand it. Then we’ll ask Anthony anything that we’re still wondering about. I’m sure he’ll be happy to help us. I’ll begin by reading Anthony’s piece, and then Anthony will read it one more time. Notice that when I read his writing, I try to read it with the correct expression. I’m sure Anthony will do this as well.

I’m making sure students understand that their role in this share (as in any content share) is not only to understand the piece of writing but to speak up if and when they are confused.

Discussion

I read Anthony’s piece, demonstrating reading with expression. This not only helps Anthony do the same when he reads but also lets him hear the beauty of his words. Sometimes, if I’m struggling to decipher what the student has written, I’ll ask him to read first. Either way, the rest of the kids get to hear the story read properly twice, which helps them enjoy it as well as understand it better.

Leah: Let’s retell Anthony’s story to make sure we understand it. I’ll start us off. One day Anthony went to Wal-Mart with his mom. Could you turn to the person next to you and continue the retelling?

Don’t Forget to Share: The Crucial Last Step in the Writing Workshop
I have them do this in pairs to bring more voices into the conversation. It also ensures that all of the kids are attempting to understand Anthony's writing.

Leah: Who wants to continue the retelling?
Aileen: He bought a ghost sticker.
Leah: And then what happened?
Seymour: He had chocolate milk.
Caitlyn: He put the ghost sticker on the window to get ready for Halloween.

Leah: Anthony, did we get it right?

Anthony (a big smile on his face): Yes.

The best way to make our students feel like writers is to show them that we understand what they have written. Each time we retell a student's piece of writing, we build his writing identity in more ways than we can possibly imagine.

Leah: Is anybody wondering anything else about Anthony's story?

Teachers often tell me their students aren't ready to do this. My response is always: “Of course they are, as long as they have a beginning understanding of what was read.” I deliberately ask, “Does anybody want to know more about Anthony's story?” rather than “What questions or comments do you have for Anthony?” or “Let's give Anthony one compliment and one suggestion,” to keep the kids directed toward the content. I have found that when I use those other wordings, students ask questions or make comments they think I'll like, rather than questions that help them better understand the writing.

Samantha: Did anybody go to Wal-Mart with you?
Anthony: My mom.

Bill: Did you buy anything else at Wal-Mart?
Anthony: Yes, a toy motorcycle.

Bridget: How did you get your mom to buy you a ghost sticker?

Anthony: When we were at the store, I said, “Mom, please, Halloween is coming. Can we buy a ghost sticker? It will make our house look so scary!”

Leah: What's your story mostly about?

I wait until near the end of the discussion to ask this question. I'll reinforce this conversational move very soon by saying, “Do you see how I asked, 'What's your story mostly about?' That might be a good question for you to ask when you're trying to better understand your classmates'
stories.” (Figure 3.1 includes other questions you or your students might use in a content share to help students discover the focus of their writing.)

**Anthony:** It’s mostly about me being excited because it was close to Halloween and I was getting a ghost sticker.

**Leah:** I want to say again all of Anthony’s answers to our wonderings. First, Anthony let us know that his writing was mostly about how excited he was that it was Halloween and that he was getting a ghost sticker. Anthony also said that he went to Wal-Mart with his mom and that while he was there he said, “Mom, please, can I get a Halloween ghost sticker? It will make our house look so scary!” He also said that he got a toy motorcycle. Anthony has lots of revision ideas, and now he has to decide which he wants to add. It’s up to Anthony, but let’s share with him what we think.

I’m doing two important things here. First, I’m reinforcing all the revision ideas by summarizing what has been said. I’m also slowing the conversation down by prompting the students to think about which ideas Anthony should add. This will help everybody develop a better understanding of revision.

**Aileen:** I think that he should add he went to Wal-Mart with his mom, because then people will know who he went with. If he doesn’t add that, people might think that he was lost.

**Leah:** You think he should start his story by saying, “I went to Wal-Mart with my mom.” You think he should include all the characters in that
first sentence. That way, people will understand that he wasn't lost at Wal-Mart. Who thinks he should add that? (Many hands go up.)

*Here, I imagine aloud exactly what Anthony's writing would sound like if he revised it to include all the characters. This approach is based on my recent observations of Anthony. At a different time or with a different kid, I might have given less support: “Anthony, why don't you imagine aloud what it would sound like if you revised your piece to include the characters?” Or, if I wanted to involve the whole class more directly, I might have said, “Everybody turn to someone near you and imagine aloud what Anthony's writing would sound like if he included all the characters.”*

Leah: What do you think?

**Anthony:** Yes, I want to add that.

**Tony:** He should add what he said to his mother. That was funny.

Leah: You think he should add the character dialogue. You think that he should add *(once again rehearsing the possible revision aloud)*

“Mom, please, can you buy me a ghost sticker? Halloween is coming and it will sure make our house look scary.”

**Thomas:** I think he should add that he got a toy motorcycle.

Leah: Now, remembering that his piece is all about being excited about Halloween, should he add the part about getting a toy motorcycle?

*There is no way for me to predict whether the kids will recognize that this detail isn't related to the focus of his story. But I know that one of Beth's goals for this unit of study is focus, so I capitalize on this teachable moment.*

Trish: I don't think he should, because that’s not what his piece is about. It's about Halloween.

Leah: Are you saying that sometimes you don’t add details because it doesn't go along with what your piece is about?

Trish: Yes.

Leah: Who agrees with what Trish just said? Sometimes you do add details because they go along with what your piece is mostly about, and sometimes you don't add details because they don't go along with what your piece is about.

As the students continue talking, it's clear this idea is still being negotiated. It is tempting just to tell the kids they should add only details that are important to the point of the story, but I know that more conversation is the only way they will truly come to understand this concept. I decide I will continue this conversation in future share sessions, minilessons, and conferences.
Leah: Anthony, what do you think? Do you want to add the part about getting a toy motorcycle?

Anthony: I'm not sure yet.

Leah: Why don't you think about it and then make a decision about it before writing workshop tomorrow?

In the end, Anthony makes his own revision decisions. Sometimes your kids will say yes to revision ideas, sometimes they will say no. Although I do keep my eye out for students who always say no, for the most part I respect their choices and remind myself that they benefit more from the conversation than they do from changing their writing. The inquiry that happens around student writing helps everyone see that behind every piece of writing is a reader trying to understand it.

Leah: We learned a lot from hearing Anthony's writing. We learned that it's important to let our readers know all the people or the characters in our story. Today and every day while you write you can also make sure that you add all of the characters into your own stories. We also learned that you can add dialogue to your stories. You can make the characters in your story talk to one another. We're still thinking about whether or not you should add any details you happen to think of or only those that are important to what your piece is about.

I reinforce the conversation by taking the revision ideas that students have suggested and making sure that everybody understands that these ideas can help them both rehearse new stories and revise their present ones.

Future Teaching Ideas

- Writers include all of the characters in their story.
- Writers ask themselves, “What is my story mostly about?”
- Listeners ask writers, “What is your story mostly about?”
- Writers add important details.
- Writers don’t include unimportant details.
- Writers include meaningful dialogue.

The Special Power of Conversation

You just observed a share in which students talked about the content of one of their classmate’s writing. Everybody was doing slightly different
things, but everybody benefited. How did the act of discussion help engage kids in the instruction that was taking place?

1. **They made important instructional decisions.** Anthony was given several revision ideas to choose from and ended up using quite a few. I believe he made the revisions because he was given a choice, not told he had to. The whole class heard these ideas and had to decide which ones they would use immediately and which ones they would tuck away for another day. They also chose what they would ask Anthony. They were not given a list of questions. They asked questions based on what they did and did not understand.

2. **They used their own language to explain complicated ideas.** When the students were discussing the importance of including all the characters, Aileen offered a unique explanation of why this was important: if Anthony didn't put all of the people in his story, then the reader might think that he was lost. This was perfect seven-year-old reasoning. Beth told me that after this share session many kids began paying attention to the characters in their stories. I think Aileen’s explanation helped bring this concept home.

3. **They got to linger over ideas.** Toward the end of the share I asked the kids, “Are you saying that sometimes you don’t add details because it doesn’t go along with what your piece is about?” At the beginning of the conversation many students thought that a good piece of writing had details everywhere, but by the end some were reconsidering their opinion. The conversation continued in future share sessions, which gave kids time to deepen their understanding and untangle some of their confusions. Eventually many kids changed their mind about the kinds of details good writing pieces have. What else could we want from a writing conversation?

A Close-in Look at Writing

To truly understand the impact content shares have on student writing, let’s visit Dustie Zocher’s first-grade classroom during her unit of
study on writing how-to pieces. Anabell is reading her how-to piece aloud to her classmates. After she finishes, the other kids retell the piece to be sure they understand it. Then Tito shares something he is wondering about. Anabell has written, “Put the supplies away in the closet,” and Tito wonders why someone would put a dirty broom next to all of the clean clothing in the closet. Anabell explains that the broom shouldn’t go in the clothing closet; it should go in the kitchen closet. Because of Tito’s question, Anabell decides to revise her writing and add the word *kitchen* (see Figure 3.2).

I like this example because it demonstrates how a revision as simple as adding one word not only improves a piece of writing but also helps kids understand the power of specificity. So often, we try to get kids to add big paragraphs when sometimes what they really need to understand is the power of one perfect word.

![Figure 3.2 Anabell Revised Her Writing by Adding the Word Kitchen](image)
1. Get the broom. Then you go.

2. Left and right on the floor then.

3. You get the dustpan.

4. Then you sweep the dirt into the dustpan.
Content shares are powerful anytime during the year, and you’ll want to conduct them from fall through spring. But here are some specific times when they’re especially beneficial:

1. **At the start of the year.** Content shares work well at the start of the year for a number of reasons. First, they build community: students to get an opportunity to know one another through the

5. Then you put the dirt into the garbage.

6. Put the supplies away into the kitchen closet.

**Planning Tips: When Should You Conduct Content Shares?**
topics and ideas they share. The start of the year is also when you're trying to help your kids get better at speaking and listening to one another, not just in shares but throughout the entire day. In Beth's classroom, the listeners needed to be sure they understood what was shared, and the speakers had to read in a voice loud enough for others to hear. These listening and speaking strategies are building blocks for other literacy activities, as well as other types of share sessions.

2. *During a revision unit of study (or the revision phase of a unit of study).* Many teachers include a revision unit of study in their curriculum. These minilessons and conferences are supported by content shares that highlight the revision that is taking place. Many teachers also teach revision as part of each unit of study. It’s helpful to conduct content shares right before students revise their writing.

3. *At the same time you teach students to question the texts they read.* In both share sessions described in this chapter, revisions took place when students questioned one another about their writing. Questioning is certainly an important strategy to use during content shares, but it’s also an important strategy students should use when reading. Many teachers I work with conduct content shares at the same time they’re working with kids on questioning the books they read. They make this connection crystal clear by saying something like, “In shares we listen to our classmates’ stories more than one time and that helps us realize what we’re still wondering about. You'll want to do something similar when you're reading a book. You'll want to read parts of the text more than one time, asking, ‘What am I still wondering about?’”

Teaching Tips: Which Kids Benefit Most from Content Shares?

Everybody benefits from a content share. However, content shares work especially well with particular students’ strengths and needs:
1. **Students who resist revision.** Students who resist your revision ideas are great kids to ask to read their writing during content shares, because they’re often more open to revision ideas from their classmates. Once several students have suggested revisions, you might imagine these ideas aloud (as I did with Anthony), so that making the changes feels easier to do. You’ll also want to get these students involved in retelling other students’ writing by saying things like, “Barb, can you start us off?” or “Juan, can you continue the retelling?”

2. **Students who don’t question the texts they read.** Some students read books quickly, never stopping to think or wonder about what they’re reading. Share sessions in which they question their classmates’ pieces of writing prompt these students also to question the texts they read. This type of questioning is usually easier in share sessions than during independent reading, because their classmates’ topics are usually familiar; they also don’t have to worry about reading the words. When I notice these students wondering about their classmates’ writing during content shares, I show them how the wondering work they just did connects with the wondering work I want them to do while reading.

### Additional Shares

The content shares you conduct in your classroom will be the result of what your students say and do on any given day, so it’s impossible to give you a list of all the types of content shares. Instead, the following table on page 45 shows you some examples of content shares that might arise in your classroom, along with the language you and your students might find helpful during your discussions.

Speaking about revision, Toni Morrison has said, “The absolutely most delicious part is finishing it and then doing it over. That’s the thrill of a lifetime for me” (1998, 200). How do we help our students see revision as a thrill of a lifetime rather than a task they dread? Use your share meetings to get kids thinking and wondering about one another’s writing and before you know it, they’ll be chomping at the bit to finish their writing and then start making it better.

---

*Don’t Forget to Share: The Crucial Last Step in the Writing Workshop*
### DIFFERENT TYPES OF CONTENT SHARES

| Students wonder about the focus in a classmate’s writing. | What’s the most important part? |
| Students wonder about the confusing parts of a classmate’s writing. | I don’t understand the part when . . . |
| Students wonder about the missing parts in a classmate’s writing. | Could you say more?  
What does that mean?  
What happened next?  
Is there a part that you didn’t write about?  
What happened before?  
What did it look like?  
What did it sound like?  
What did it feel like?  
What did your sister say?  
What did she do?  
What were you thinking? |
| Students wonder about the audience of a classmate’s writing. | Who are you writing this for?  
What do you want the reader to understand after reading this? |

---

### Content Shares at a Glance

**What is a content share?**
In a content share, one or two (perhaps three) students read their writing aloud. After each kid reads, the teacher asks the rest of the children to retell what they heard to make sure that everyone understands it. Then the kids ask for more information. Finally, the writer decides which parts of the discussion (if any) will help her revise the writing.

**When should you conduct content shares?**
- At the start of the year
- During a revision unit of study (or the revision phase of a unit of study)
- At the same time you’re teaching students to question the texts they read

**Which students benefit most from content shares?**
- Students who resist revision
- Students who don’t question the texts they read
Thank you for sampling this resource.

For more information or to purchase, please visit Heinemann by clicking the link below:


Use of this material is solely for individual, noncommercial use and is for informational purposes only.